



Connecticut Department of
**ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Public Hearing – February 19, 2016
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Robert J. Klee

Senate Joint Resolution 4 - A RESOLUTION MEMORIALIZING THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS TO PERMANENTLY PRESERVE PLUM ISLAND AS A NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding **Senate Joint Resolution 4 - A RESOLUTION MEMORIALIZING THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS TO PERMANENTLY PRESERVE PLUM ISLAND AS A NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE.**

The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) is pleased to offer this testimony in support of the Senate Joint Resolution 4 calling “upon the Congress of the United States to protect the public's interest in assuring Plum Island's and Long Island Sound's economic, environmental, historic and cultural value through the permanent preservation of their habitats and wildlife by repealing those provisions of Public Law 110-329 and Public Law 112-74 that require the sale of Plum Island and by designating Plum Island as a National Wildlife Refuge”.

DEEP applauds the ongoing efforts of Connecticut's congressional delegation, and many others, to ensure that Plum Island's unique and valuable habitat - and the wildlife, particularly waterfowl, it attracts – are protected after the existing U.S. Animal Disease Center is relocated to Kansas.

While it may be desirable for the Department of Homeland Security and the Government Services Administration to seek appropriate new uses for the parts of the island that currently house government operations, the vast majority – some 80% - of the island's 840 acres should never be developed and ideally, would be permanently preserved by the federal government as a National Wildlife Refuge. At a bare minimum, requirements to sell the island to the highest bidder would not only make it prohibitive for others to step in to acquire and preserve the island, but fly in the face of common sense financially for U.S. taxpayers. The federal government often spends large sums to acquire property for preservation purposes and in this instance, it already owns property that is as worthy of preservation as any.

As the Resolution notes, “the ecological value of Plum Island's habitats have been acknowledged by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service through its designation of Plum Island as one of the Northeast Coastal Areas Study Significant Coastal Habitat sites,” and has “also been recognized as an important coastal resource pursuant to the federal Coastal Barrier Resources Act, and is included within the Coastal Barrier Resources System”. Further, Plum Island “provides essential habitat to more than two hundred migratory,

overwintering, breeding or resident songbirds, waterbirds or birds of prey, including, but not limited to, the rare bank swallow, osprey, federally endangered roseate tern and the federally threatened piping plover”.

The list of assets associated with Plum Island also includes “natural communities and plant species, including an extensive wooded freshwater wetland in the southwestern section of the island and a maritime dune community, which collectively provide habitat for a number of rare and endangered plant species, including such rare plants as seabeach and slender knotweed, blackjack oak and spring ladies' tresses” and, as was witnessed by numerous individuals this year, its waters host the endangered North Atlantic Right Whale as well as other important marine life.

In sum, DEEP wholeheartedly supports this Resolution and applauds the efforts of our federal delegation to accomplish the repeal of those provisions of Public Law 110-329 and Public Law 112-74 that require the sale of Plum Island and the subsequent designation of Plum Island as a National Wildlife Refuge as called for in Senate Joint Resolution 4.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact Robert LaFrance, DEEP’s Director of Governmental Affairs, at 860.424.3401 or Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov or, Elizabeth McAuliffe, DEEP Legislative Liaison, at 860.424.3458 or Elizabeth.McAuliffe@ct.gov.